

Building Anew

August 2019



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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A Memo

From Executive Director Shawn Ryan



NOTE: GVRA staff and agency partners received this memo in July.

Several weeks ago, I wrote you to update you on what I have been working on since I arrived at GVRA earlier this year and to lay out some plans for the future. This email is another update and marks the beginning of an intensive period of change we will undergo here. I apologize for its length, but I encourage you to read it in its entirety.

As you know, for the past two months the consulting firm, Accenture, has been on-site here in Atlanta. Their team has also been at GIB and has visited several field offices to interview employees there. All told, they interviewed and directly interacted with more than 180 members of our staff. Included in this email, you will find the executive summary of the report on their findings. Please read it, as it will form the basis of GVRA's client- and customer-

focused future. Our "clients" are the citizens we serve and our administrative "customers" are all of you: our GVRA employees, in the field and in Atlanta.

Virtually every aspect of our administrative functions (Business Applications, Communications and Marketing, Facilities, Fiscal Services, General Counsel, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Strategy and Innovation) will be changing in some way. As you will see from the attached documents, most of the proposed organizational structure will look different once we have completed an extensive reorganization and reduction in force. This reduction and reorganization is necessary and required 1) because the legislature cut our administrative budget beginning in State Fiscal Year 2020, and 2) because we simply are not providing quality administrative services.

At the same time, our processes will also be changing, often significantly. Accenture is proposing an extensive list of process improvements. As their team found, many of GVRA's current processes are "inefficient and lack formality; others are duplicative and misaligned with the Agency." We are also far too reliant on manual and paper processes, even when an electronic alternative may be available. In the coming weeks, I will be sending additional communications about where, when and how our processes will begin to change.



I only received Accenture's assessment last week, and I am still considering their ideas. Although nothing is set in stone, I want to be clear with those of you currently working in an administrative function: we will be reducing positions and changing many of the ones we currently have. That means we will be competitively hiring to fill most of these new roles. If you do not see your current role within the proposed organizational chart, or even if you do, you will more than likely be asked to apply for a new position here. That process will begin in the coming weeks and months; it will not happen overnight. The changes we need to accomplish our mission are extensive and extensive change takes time.

Many of you from our programs have reached out to me to express concern, displeasure and even sadness with the way GVRA currently functions. Accenture heard the exact same concerns and stories in the six field offices they visited. Right now, those of you in the field are probably thinking, "My part of GVRA is broken. Why isn't he fixing my part first?" I understand your concern. Our administrative functions form the foundation of our entire organization. If they are not working properly, nothing will. It is like the parable of building a house on sand – without a solid foundation we will continue to sink.

Others I know have questions about why GIB is receiving attention first among the programs. That answer is simple: GIB has large organizational, process and procedural challenges. The result of those challenges is that GIB's operating reserve has been eroding for years. Financially, we have reached a point where the situation is untenable, and putting GIB on a path to sustainability simply cannot wait any longer. Put more simply, change is necessary or GIB will run out of funding. We have massive issues across GVRA, but none is more acute than the financial situation at GIB. That

criticality is forcing me to act there first.

Finally, the plan going forward is to reengage with Accenture so they can help implement the myriad changes needed to get GVRA where we need to go. They will be assisting with the reorganizations and with implementing new policies. I will have more information on both of those initiatives soon. At the same time, they will embark on a full assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation's field services operations. Field Services is the largest and most visible part of this organization and, as currently designed, it is not successfully serving its clients. I expect to receive a similar report from Accenture once that assessment concludes. I do not yet have a timeframe for that.

As Winston Churchill said of the Second Battle of El Alamein at the beginning of World War II, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." This will be a long and challenging process. But it is a necessary one if GVRA is to fulfill its noble mission. Working together, we can get back to our mission and our purpose. Please join me as we work to successfully provide employment and independence for Georgians with disabilities. Stay tuned.



Teaming Up

The Recent TEAM 26 Job Workshop



GVRA's TEAM 26 recently played host to Veterans Job Readiness Workshop Series/Mini-Job Fair. The event, held at the Riverside EpiCenter in Austell, was a result of a partnership with Lisa Cupid, Cobb County District 4 Commissioner.



GAD You're Here

GVRA at Annual Conference

By Project Independence Program Manager Kay McGill

Georgia Association of the Deaf (GAD) held its 55th Biannual Conference at the Atlanta School for the Deaf in Atlanta from June 7-9.

Established in 1910, the Georgia Association of the Deaf is the largest Deaf organization focused on persons with hearing loss in Georgia. The main goal of GAD is to bring persons with hearing loss in Georgia together to advocate for equal rights.

On June 8, Kay McGill, who heads GVRA's Project Independence, presented to the GAD membership on her group's efforts to

help the community. The focus of the presentation was to provide an overview of the program, share resources and demonstrate various aids and devices to those persons with a dual vision and hearing loss.

Project Independence provides daily living skills training to persons who are 55 years of age and older who have a significant vision impairment or who have the dual vision and hearing loss.



Career X Week at Cave Spring



Nearly a dozen young people got on-the-job experience at the recent Career E(X)ploration Week at Cave Spring Center. The event was aimed at helping students with disabilities get a better gauge of what opportunities are available to them in the working world.



Congratulations!

DAS Employee of the Month

The following nomination was submitted by Dianna Scherer in the category of Teamwork:

Ms. Kara Russell is one of best team players I have had the privilege to work with at DAS. When a unit member is on leave, she completes her assigned work coverage and then searches through the caseload to find other actions she can take to assist her co-workers.

Ms. Russell also readily shares her expertise.

She worked with a unit member who was struggling with caseload management and enabled that person to reduce her caseload significantly. What is more impressive is that with the skills that adjudicator learned, she has been able to maintain an acceptable caseload size.

Ms. Russell is seen regularly conferring with the others regarding the processing of difficult claims. She is truly an asset to the agency and to her unit. I am proud to nominate Kara Russell as employee of the month.

Getting the Job Done

Working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clients

Are you experiencing an increase in service outreach to clients who are Deaf or have hearing loss?

Do you wish you knew more about how to adequately accommodate people with hearing loss on the job?

Do you hope to work more effectively and confidently with this population?

This one day seminar is your starting point.

Join us for a day of professional development hosted by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

The target audience includes the following:

Job Coaches

Job readiness Instructors

Employment Consultants

July 23 in Dallas

July 24 in Rome

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days

DALLAS GVRA

101 Bainbridge Way

Suite 100

Dallas, GA 30132

Rome GVRA



Analyzing A&Is

VR Team Works to Lower Processing Time



In these pictures, Metro VR staff work on outstanding A&Is (authorization and invoice). Statewide, GVRA has a goal of processing all A&I's within 90 days.



Crossing the Stage

Summer Graduation at RWS

Fifty three students participated in graduation ceremonies on June 26th at the Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Campus.

Dr. Zephine Smith-Dixon, Director of Special Education for the Georgia Department of Education, delivered the commencement address.

During her remarks, Dr. Smith-Dixon congratulated the students on their moment of excellence and challenged them to even greater excellence in the future. "This is not the end," she said, "but the beginning. How will you make this world a better place? This world is waiting on you."

After her speech, Dr. Smith-Dixon assisted GVRA Executive Director Shawn Ryan in the distribution of certificates to the honorees.

A special reunion took place during the

ceremony. While Willie Sanders was receiving his graduation certificate, his sister, Tracie Sanders, emerged from back stage to give him a hug. Ms. Sanders had been on deployment with the United States Army, and Willie had not seen her in many months. His sister's attendance at the graduation had been a secret until she walked onto the stage.

Jonathan Evens, a June 2016 RWS graduate, delivered the charge to the students, sharing with them the story of his success and encouraging them to never give up on their dreams.

RWS holds two graduation ceremonies each year. A total of 69 students had qualified for the June ceremony. As reported on graduation day, more than 50 percent of the graduates already had jobs in their home towns and more than 80 percent of those students still living on campus had employment interviews



The Next Chapter

Another Graduation at CSC

A few days prior to the RWS graduation, Cave Spring Center (CSC) also played host to a summer graduation for students.

Welcoming everyone to the event was CSC Director Russell Fleming, who spoke of the students' goals as they relate to starting their career.

Russell yielded the stage to keynote speaker Leanne Johnson, who runs Thrive Autism Consulting. Leanne said that her first experience with disability was both memorable and almost incomprehensible for a grade schooler. Before her 12th birthday, a friend of Leanne's who had cerebral palsy passed away, and this event would forever change Leanne's life.

Fast forward more than a decade. Upon giving birth to a child with autism, Leanne was told by doctor's that he would never speak to her, never truly understand her as his mother. But the doctors were wrong.

"We took it one day at a time, and now I

have an eight year old. A social and speaking eight year old," she said. "Everyone is special, and everyone deserves a chance to live the best life they can live."

After having her second child with autism, Leanne knew that she wanted to give back to the community and provide resources were they were lacking. As a result, she started the nonprofit Thrive Autism Consulting, a partner of GVRA whose aim is to help those with autism grow to live and work independently.

Following the keynote speech, GVRA Executive Director Shawn Ryan congratulated the dozen graduates and helped in the presentation of diplomas as each graduate made their way from their seats to the stage to be recognized.

"Life is full of challenges. They're not going to stop," he said. "But you know that when you work hard, you can overcome them."



Let's Talk

The Georgia Vision Alliance

By Directory of Sensory Services Denine Woodson

The annual Georgia Vision Alliance was held on June 15th at the Center for the Visually Impaired in Atlanta. Executive Director Shawn Ryan met with community members from as far away as Savannah to address issues affecting GVRA and the services provided to the Blind community.

Mr. Ryan spoke on upcoming changes to GVRA as a whole. The audience applauded

his commitment to "make GVRA better."

Director of Sensory Services Denine Woodson and Assistant Director of Blind Services Shirley Robinson were in attendance as well as new Counselor for the Blind, Jamila Lane. They will incorporate the audience's concerns into action plans for the upcoming year. VR looks to strengthen its services and communication with the community.



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Dale Washburn



Dale Washburn grew up in Jones County, the oldest of four sons. He received his formal education in the Jones County Public School System and at Macon State College.

He entered the real estate brokerage business in 1975 and has remained active in the real estate business since that time. His experience includes residential and commercial brokerage and development as well as property management, both as a practitioner and as a principal broker who is responsible for the supervision of other agents.

He has been a licensed instructor for several years and owns and operates the Dale Washburn School of Real Estate. He has written a pre license textbook, "Basics in the Business of Real Estate," that he now uses in classes at his school. He also wrote a 25-hour post-licensing textbook, "You Have a Real Estate License, Now What?" In addition,

he has written several continuing education courses that are approved by the Georgia Real Estate Commission.

Dale has been active at every level of the realtor organization having served as Local Board President, Georgia Association of Realtors Vice President and several terms as National Association of Realtors Director. He was honored to be the Middle Georgia Association of Realtors Realtor of the Year in 1994 and Georgia Realtor of the Year in 2004.

Dale has been active politically for many years. He served as Vice Chair of the Jones County Commission from 1985 through 1988. He has been involved in the campaigns of a number of congressional and legislative candidates as well as serving as a political activist in the realtor organization for issues involving real estate as well as private property rights.

He is an active member of Ingleside Baptist Church in Macon where he serves as a deacon and adult bible study leader.

He and his wife Donna have been married for 43 years. They have three sons, a daughter, three daughters in law and five grandchildren. They also have an 85-pound mixed breed dog that was rescued from a terrible situation in downtown Macon. He is named Roscoe.

Dale considers it a great honor to have been elected to the Georgia House of Representatives.



New and Old Faces

The SRC Welcomes New Members

The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council welcomed a slew of new members during a recent orientation and the Council's quarterly meeting.

"We are so excited that the new members are part of our family now," said SRC Chairwoman Rossany Rios. "We want everyone to have a good foundation, and we're excited about what the future holds."

Aldridge, Deborah Hibben, Samuel Verniero, Cherise Mlott and Austin McDonald.

The entirety of the SRC was on hand at their quarterly meeting in Savannah as part of the annual Georgia Rehabilitation Association annual conference. Below is a picture from that meeting.

New members include Kate Brady, Tina



Success!

One Client's Story

By Communications Specialist Tom Connelly

Delphina Smith, a client who recently started work at a local Burger King, is a living example of the power of a positive attitude.

Like many others, Delphina, who calls LaGrange home, sought services with GVRA due to difficulty securing a job. Christopher S. Smith, MRC, CRC Team Lead of the LaGrange office, and his staff provided Ms. Smith with a number of services to help her achieve her goal. Among these were psychological evaluations as well as work evaluations. The former were used to determine her functional needs as well as to pinpoint her specific learning disability. The work evaluations determined her level of functioning regarding such things as stamina and endurance.

While those were the primary services provided, they were far from all the services she received. VR counseling and guidance was provided for the duration of her case to deal with a host of challenges. She was given an eye examination, and VR helped her purchase her first pair of glasses.

Work adjustment was provided, since Delphina was unemployed for many years. After this, she took part in employment skills training in the area of janitorial and housekeeping. VR then sent Ms. Smith to New Ventures, a local Community Rehab Partner. At this location, she completed janitorial training, among others. Following that, Delphina was referred to the Achievement Center so she could receive job placement services. Included in this classification were job readiness training,

job coaching, personal and social adjustment, in addition to job placement services. Then, Ms. Smith, with the assistance of a job developer, secured employment in the housekeeping department at the Hampton Inn in LaGrange. In this capacity, she earned \$8.00 per hour. But in the end, the job just wasn't a great fit.

VR wasn't done assisting Delphina though. The agency worked with her to determine potential problems in her previous job. Because she experienced difficulty remembering numbers correctly as well as following instructions, VR bought an IPOD Touch Pad for Ms. Smith. Finally, all the collaborative hard work paid off, and Delphina was able to find a job at a local Burger King that she felt was a good fit for her skill set.

Helping persons with disabilities find and keep gainful employment is what VR is all about. Congratulations on your good work, Mr. Smith, and thank you to the LaGrange office!



**Do your duty
and a little more,
and the future will
take care of itself.**

~ Andrew Carnegie

A Request

Every month, the GVRA Office of Marketing and Communications works with staff, providers and partners to help produce this newsletter. Our goal is to not just give a window into the inner workings of GVRA but also to demonstrate the key partnerships and collaborations that make what we do possible.

That said, we're always looking for new and better ways to highlight these partnerships and the work that others outside of GVRA do in the disability community. If there's an event you'd like us to highlight or a client who is really knocking it out of the park, we want to showcase these things in these very pages.

So please, if there's something you'd like to share or you have questions or comments, please email Communications Manager John Boan at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov.

Thank you.

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Printed at Roosevelt Warm Springs

